

County Historical Society. The kindly caretaker took the yellowed papers off my cherry back and put me where everyone could see me. I must have looked a sight, for he spent several days going over my rungs and putting a new cane seat on me. The heat had been hard on my finish, too, but I look as good as new now. He keeps me polished even though no one sits and rocks on me anymore. The visitors just walk by, look, and laugh at my odd shape. They think the rockers are funny. The rockers, that stick out as far in front as behind, put on me so long ago by the man who had never heard of anything like that except on cradles.

October Afternoon

Miriam Burrell

THE bright October sunlight flooded the huge windows across the front of the restaurant. Mary Andrews, wearing a white coat, with the sun streaming through her blond hair, sat with her back to the light.

At a table across the room near the cashier's cage, John Fowler thought she looked like an angel. His eyes remained on her steadily, as his hands made methodical movements with his bread and his soup spoon. There was a peaceful, quiet look on his face as he stared at her.

Behind his serene face, John Fowler's mind was moving with incredible speed. He noticed all the people in the restaurant who did not see him, who did not recognize him, who did not know who he was. He recognized the irony of the situation . . . the people who could sit here in this restaurant with the Son of God only steps away, and not feel His presence, yet he forgave them their lack of spiritual awareness. And all the while his mind recognized that this girl, who was the object of his gaze, was an angel.

The girl was rising from her chair now, slim and lovely, her short white coat belted tightly at the waist. She began to thread her way gracefully between the tables toward the cashier's cage. John Fowler's hands remained motionless as he gazed at her. She couldn't have been older than twenty. As she drew close to him, his face softened with a compassionate smile that was almost spiritual in its purity. Surely she was an angel.

The girl was looking at him . . . she . . . *she was smiling back at him.*

Her smile went deep into John Fowler's mind, deep, deep, down to a little boy who had once cried piteously for recognition; and spiraling upward again into his thoughts of now, it enriched and made generous his spirit. Yes, yes, she was an angel. She would share his glory. He would bestow a rich and full share of his glory upon her. His look of compassionate love deepened to an intense glow.

Rising quietly and unobtrusively, he walked to the cashier's cage and paid his bill, then followed the girl as she left the restaurant. A rather tall man, he stooped his shoulders and kept his knees bent as he moved, and his walk had the appearance of a slouching shuffle. His face was strangely shaped; a low narrow forehead and broad cheekbones, which tapered suddenly to a very narrow chin. His mouth was wide and shapeless.

Following her along the crowded sidewalks, he kept about a half block behind her. He did not wish to approach her in the presence of heathens and non-believers.

It was a small town, and soon the girl was walking along the road that led to the farming area. She did not look back, but John Fowler knew that she was aware of his presence behind her. Was she not an angel?

There had been no houses for a half mile now, and would not be for a while. The fields at the side of the road were rich with the brilliant reds and yellows and browns of autumn. Here and there, set back several hundred yards from this main road, were scattered farmhouses, their broad lawns broken only by wagon-ruts and foot paths. Now was the time to approach her. His heart quickened at the thought; at the thought of her joy.

He increased his pace rapidly and soon was a few feet behind her. She turned just as his hand touched her arm and gave a startled gasp. "Oh, heaven's, I didn't know you were behind me!"

She said "heaven." He smiled at her. "I knew that you recognized me in the restaurant." His hand gripped her elbow firmly.

"Why, I didn't recognize you. I'm sorry if I gave you the idea that I was flirting. You looked so nice, so when you smiled at me I smiled back. I'm sorry if I gave the wrong impression." Her eyes were a startled blue, and her skin almost transparent in its clearness. She was trying to loosen her arm.

John Fowler could read her thoughts. She was overwhelmed at his acceptance of her. He must take her now to share his glory. She must be made at once to realize the depth of her acceptance. His grip tightened on her arm, and his face remained gentle and loving as he led her to a barn that stood in the shade of a group of trees.

She was gasping now and crying, and trying hard to pull away, but John Fowler had the strength of two men in his body; and so he should have, for he was inspired. He knew what he would do. He would crucify her. She would be on his right hand in the Kingdom of God. His heart beat in a warm rush of feeling.

He forced her into the barn and shut and bolted the door. Leading her to the opposite wall and pressing her shoulders firmly, he pushed her down onto a bale of straw and held her tightly till she ceased struggling. Then he began a search through the dim mustiness of the barn's interior, keeping his eye all the while on the girl. She was

crying hysterically now. She wouldn't be crying for long, he thought. She would share his glory.

He found what he wanted in the back of the horse stall. It had been converted into a workshop, and there were a hammer and nails and several boards. He brought these back to the area near the door, so that he could watch the girl while he worked. He wanted to watch her face change from fear to wonder and then to joy, as she realized what he was doing.

Laying the strips of wood down, he formed them into a cross and began to hammer them securely. When it was finished he looked up. The girl's face looked horrible and old and her throat worked convulsively. "Wh-what are you doing?" Her voice was almost a whisper.

He walked to her slowly and kneeled in front of her. "You are to share my glory," he said. "You will be crucified as I was, 2000 years ago." His hands began gently to remove her shoes and stockings.

The girl had lost consciousness. Quietly, and without warning, she had slumped and seemed to melt onto the floor. Faintly puzzled, he put his hands under her arms and dragged her toward the rude cross before the door. He laid her on it tenderly, stretching her arms out the length of the wood, pressing her childlike feet securely down as he tied them with his belt. Her left hand he tied with his handkerchief, but her right hand he left free, as he could find nothing with which to tie it.

She was coming to. Her eyelids were fluttering. She was breathing in a strange way, wheezing and whimpering like a child. "Gather ye little children around me," thought John Fowler.

And then her eyes opened wide, and she screamed. Long and terribly she screamed, her voice hoarse yet shrill, her eyes starting from her head, the pupils dilated, her one free hand beating the air back and forth and then fluttering, and yanking at her hair. She screamed and screamed, and not once did she cease even when she dragged her lungs full of air.

He tried to quiet her. He must quiet her. She must be made to realize. He kissed her little soft feet, and pressed them to his cheek. He knelt by her head and stroked her cheeks, and the compassion and love on his face was tender beyond belief. But she would not stop. She seemed to be screaming from a depth below reality now, automatically, not realizing her surroundings.

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Through her madness of fear, Mary Andrews became aware of a face, a face that registered a horror to match her own, in a square of light high above her. Her fear became a thing that was below her consciousness. She continued to scream, but was not aware that she did so, as a tiny part of her mind followed the movements of the face in the window, as it entered and became a man; as it stealthily moved— slowly, cautiously, almost seeming not to move; as it ebbed

and returned in her eyes; and then as it picked up the pitchfork in the corner, and crept forward.

John Fowler never saw the pitchfork, but as his face took on a startled look, and then turned and rolled back, the pleading eyes he turned on the farmer standing there, were once more those of a tear-stained little boy, crying with all his heart to be loved.

The Sirloin

J. R. Nieff

JOHNNY BECKER quickly checked the orders in his hand, and with a smile of self-satisfaction stacked them neatly on the sales manager's desk. Business had been good, but the day was over and Johnny was anxious to get home, away from the office, the noisy streets, the chattering females. At the moment his mind was filled with delightful visions of the thick (and he hoped rare and juicy) sirloin he was having for his dinner.

As he was making his way out of the office the sound of feminine laughter jerked his thoughts away from the sirloin. "It must be Mary again," he thought to himself, "telling everyone she is going to marry me." He couldn't quite understand it. Mary was a cute kid and could make her choice from any guy in the office. Why did she have to pick on him? But Johnny couldn't see himself married. Marriage was for the other guys. They could have the white bungalows in the suburbs; the loving wives in their gayly checked aprons; the long drives to and from the office; the screaming, kicking kids that apparently were included in the deal. Yes sir! They could have it! All of it!

He had stopped at the meat market the night before, and old Joe the butcher had sold him just what he wanted—even told him how to broil it.

"Have you broiler good and hot, Mr. Becker," he had said, "then put him in gently and cook him for thirty minutes all over. When he's sizzling good, sprinkle a leetle salt on top and put him on a nice hot plate. That's the way my Maria do it. I watch her many time." At this point Joe's mouth had begun to water, but he continued, "But you shouldn't cook him, Johnny; thassa no man's job—you need a nicea sweeta young wife. I know; I use to cook some myself. Terrible! sometime the dog she no eat it. But my Maria—ah, she's a wonderful cook."

Johnny thanked him for the steak and for the instructions, and hoped to himself that he would do a better job with this one. The last time—but he couldn't think about it any more. It had been a horrible mess, even worse than army chow. His apartment still smelled like a smoke house in spite of everything he had done to sweeten up the place. But that was all in the past. This time would be different.